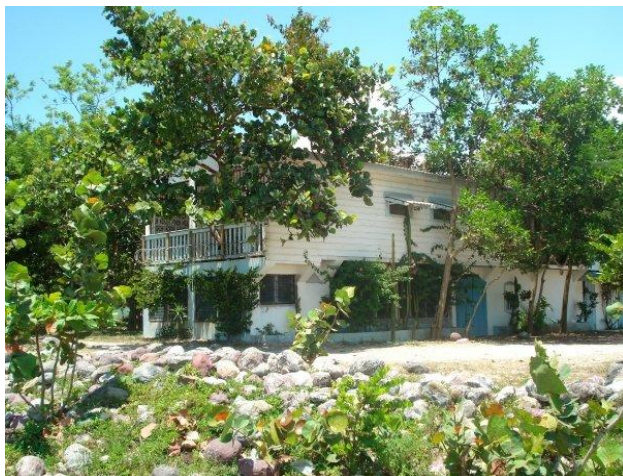


**Indira Dhandapani – El Porvenir, Honduras
Siena 2010/AMC 2014**

For my summer of service, I traveled to a small town called El Porvenir on the Northern coast of Honduras. For two months, I stayed in a volunteer house which gave me the opportunity to meet volunteers from all over the world. Our house sat right on the beach with a gorgeous view overlooking the Sea, but on the other side we had a wonderful view of the mountains.

Each and every day I admired the beauty of the sea and the mountains and thought how lucky these people were to live amongst such natural beauties. They certainly don't compare to our brick buildings and parking lots.



In the mornings, I spent my time teaching at the kinder which is essentially a preschool. Rosa was the teacher who rode her bike in every morning. Unfortunately, Rosa is a volunteer and was not paid for the amazing work she did. She also brought with her Annie and Alex, her 2 year old twins. There was no one at home to watch the kids, so she rode her bike with Annie in the basket and Alex sitting on the bar. How she rode down those streets with two kids, I still cannot figure out.



During class we always followed a set schedule. We started by sitting the kids down and reviewing the date. That was always followed up by a song and a quick review of the alphabet, numbers, and colors. Next, we always did a crafts project with the kids to either help develop their coordination skills or to reinforce writing and recognition of the alphabet and numbers. Finally, we all came together for story time and finished off by brushing our teeth. The kids were not disciplined and were constantly yelling and running around. It was a challenge getting them to pay attention, but they were so cute that I couldn't yell at them!



I always had the afternoons off because this was when the older kids went to public school. Often times, the teachers in the public school went on strike because they weren't getting paid. During those times, I went to Abuela's house and worked with the older kids. Abuela lives with about 10 of her daughters and daughter-in-laws and all their kids. At any given time, there were 30-40 kids running around their courtyard. The houses were very simple, mostly wooden and tin. In the center of the courtyard was a large tree where I used to sit and teach the kids. I would work on math and English with the older kids. They were always so eager to learn! I wish I had more one-on-one time with the older ones. Some of them showed some real potential, but at the rate they were going, I would be surprised if they ever made it to high school. Nobody forced them to go to school and there was nobody to help them with homework. But there were plenty of clothes to wash and kids to look after which kept them busy.



Twice a week in the evenings, I took it upon myself to start an English class with a group who was eager to learn. I taught them the very basics such as how to introduce themselves, colors, numbers, and short phrases. Many of them didn't bother to study, but they always made sure they showed up for class. Class was always fun, some of my students had some loud personalities. I'd teach them for an hour or two, and then we would just sit out on the porch and talk. This group very quickly became a second family to me. I watched soccer games with them, danced in the streets during carnival, and had a huge going-away party when my two months were up.



Besides the ordinary adjustments of living in a developing country, I encountered a few additional obstacles. Within the first week of arriving in Honduras, we were hit with an earthquake that measured a 7 on the Richter scale. The subsequent tsunami watch and tremors that we felt for weeks to come scared not only myself, but also the locals. Many people were afraid to even sleep in their own homes in fear that their home would collapse on them. We saw a lot of tents over the course of the next few weeks. We also encountered a military coup towards the end of my two months. The current president was attempting to change the country's constitution so that he could stay in term longer, but the military ran him out of the country. There were a lot of riots and protests which made the cities unsafe.

From the countryside all we could do was huddle around the radios and the few TVs that people have and hope for the best. I actually had a hard time leaving the country because of everything that was happening politically. Luckily, the community came together and helped me get a safe flight out of the country.



Overall, I couldn't have asked for a better experience. I went to Honduras thinking I was going to help the community for a few weeks, get to know some of the locals, and then come back to the states eager to see my family. Instead, it was the community who had accepted me with open arms and transformed me into a Latina. I considered the kids in the kinder all my own kids and siblings, and my English class became my family and friends. The way that they had all accepted me with no reservations and no bias really inspired me. Within weeks they were able to make Honduras feel like home to me. I can only hope that some day I might be able to live like them: to live a simple life, completely content, and with an open mind and open heart.

